

Confident

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[0 : 00] Let's pray as we take a look at, I'm going to focus particularly on the first few verses, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

Those other verses that are there are really real life situations reflecting the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee. So let's pray. Gracious God, as we come to your word now, we ask that you would speak clearly to us particularly, Lord, as we gather in this place, we are more religious than your average Aussie person.

And so, Lord, you are eyeballing us when you say these words. Father, if we trust in our religion and not in Jesus, then, Lord, convict us of that tonight.

Open up our hearts. May we look only to Jesus and not what you're doing in us. And we ask it for your sake. Amen. I heard the story of a lad who mounted a campaign just before Christmas in order to secure a new bike for Christmas.

And so he badgered his parents, as you kind of do at that age. His mother, confusing Jesus with Santa, said to him, well, why don't you write a letter to Jesus and tell him why you deserve to have this bike?

[1 : 27] And the young lad trudged upstairs and started to write his letter. Dear Jesus, I've been good all year. He thought to himself, no, that's not right. I haven't been good all year.

So he screwed up, threw it again, threw it down in the bin. Started writing again. Dear Jesus, I've been good for the last six months. Nah, that's not true either.

I mean, he's a realist more than anything, this kid. Strew it up, threw it away again. Started again. Dear Jesus, I've been good all week. Ah, no, hang on a bit. There was that incident yesterday. So he paused, really frustrated, threw that in the bin. Gets up, walks downstairs, walks into the living room, up to the mantelpiece. The nativity scene is there.

Grabs Mary out of the nativity scene. Walks back up into his bedroom. Plonks her down on the desk. Sits down and starts to write his letter. Dear Jesus, if you ever want to see your mother again, He had a few things worked out about Jesus.

[2 : 30] He knew that Mary was Jesus' mother, and that's kind of a start. But in terms of how to relate to God, had no clue whatsoever. In one sense, you could say he's trying to relate to God like a terrorist.

He's trying to force God's hand. And this story of the Pharisee and the tax collector really helped us in how we are to relate to God, in our confusion of what it means for us in relating to God.

This story is a story where Jesus introduces us to two extraordinary men. They are almost comic characters.

I think Jesus draws them so starkly apart so that we can see the issue so clearly. And the issue is there clearly in verse 9. It says there, take a look at it if you've got your Bibles there.

It says, But it's not just a parable about looking down on other people.

[3 : 38] It's kind of got a little bit more depth than me just kind of turning my nose up at people as I walk past them in the street or something. The core issue is where we stand with God.

It's spelt out for us in verse 14. I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. That's the core issue.

My confidence in my righteousness somehow leading me to be justified before God. That's the issue that Jesus wants to address.

The story is about people who are self-confident, who are self-righteous, and somehow it makes them think that I'm okay with God, therefore.

And when Jesus tells this story, He is talking particularly to people who make attempts at being religious. You could say that as He tells this story, Jesus is eyeballing people like you and me who

would gather in a church and sing hymns and open up the Bible and pray and do all kinds of good Christian kind of stuff.

[4 : 53] And His message is very clear for us. God is not pleased by self-confidence or self-righteousness. He is only pleased with people who come to Him in humility.

So let's have a look at it. Got your Bibles? Turn them open. Luke 18. As you know from verse 10, there are two men who go up to the temple to pray, but in verse 14, it says that only one of them goes home okay with God.

Only one of them goes home justified or as a friend of God's. In the movie Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome, there is this post-war scenario.

And if two people get into a bit of biff, then what they would do is they would go into the Thunderdome to sort it out. I mean, sort it out to the death was the idea. And as the two people would go into the Thunderdome, this chant would go up, two men enter, one man leaves. Two men enter, one man leaves. And that is what we're dealing with here in this parable. There is a very real sense that as Jesus tells this story, two people go into the temple to do business with God, but only one of them is actually going to walk away having dealt with God, done any sort of business with God in any sort of meaningful way.

[6 : 10] We are told that one of them is a tax collector, the other is a Pharisee. We need to be careful not to muck it up right from the start, because if you're familiar with the Bible at all, we automatically go boo his to the Pharisee.

Because we know that the Pharisee is the dude that Jesus consistently sticks the booting to. The Pharisees are the guys that Jesus always sets up. They always look bad in Jesus' mind.

And so we need to try and hear this story as it would have been for Jesus' mates when the very first time they heard it, Peter, James, John and the rest of the boys, when they first heard this, they would have heard it very differently than what we hear it right now.

They would have known the tax collector as the scum. The tax collector was the bad guy. He was the guy who wore the black hat and he was the guy who rode around on the mean-looking camels with the doof-doof kind of music.

It's kind of difficult for us to find a parallel in this world of someone who was just as much of a scum as what a Pharisee was in first-century Palestine. They were filth.

[7 : 24] They were traitors. They sold out their God for money. They were not welcomed in any house of worship. They were scum. The Pharisee, on the other hand, was deeply, deeply respected in first-century Palestine.

They were highly regarded in society. You know, they were the guys who, they wore the white hats. They were the good guys. They rode around on respectable camels, speed-limited camels, Camry kind of camels.

They were not men who made their living out of religion. They were regular church attendees who were deeply serious about God, their relationship with God.

And so, in Jesus' day, the people would go boo his scumbag to the tax collector, but not to the Pharisee. The Pharisee is the guy who is deadly earnest about God.

He is a valuable member of society and a very significant contributor to the people of God. Well, that's the two extraordinary men. So now let's look at their two prayers because their two prayers reveal their hearts.

[8 : 41] First, let's have a look at the Pharisee's prayer. It reveals his heart very clearly. Now, as a bit of amusement, occasionally I read the personal ads in the newspaper.

That's revealed something twisted about me. But I can't help but think why a person would want to publicly advertise their finer points in order to find someone else to love them, you know, to do it in a newspaper.

And sometimes when you look at the list, there's not a whole lot of good points. They don't really put, you know, they're trying to put their best foot forward. So here's this guy I got, 30-year-old, six foot tall, brown hair, green eyes.

That's it. Six foot tall, brown hair, green eyes. And he's seeking a lady for a friendship and or relationship. Well, you're going to be ringing that guy up, aren't you?

I mean, he's not saying a whole lot about himself, is he? He doesn't appear to have a lot of good points, but at the very least, he's not advertising his bad points. That's one thing that I've consistently noticed in the personal ads.

[9 : 42] I've never noticed anyone to advertise their bad points. I've never noticed anyone to say, I'm broke, I haven't got a job, I'm looking for somewhere to live, I've got two greyhounds, I want someone to kind of mother me, do my housework, the washing, cook for me, and all that sort of stuff.

Anyone interested? I've never noticed that. Because our normal human tendency, when we relate to one another, is to put our best foot forward. That's what we do.

By the way, I apologise if you actually have done the personal ad thing and it's worked out for you. Good on you. Our normal human tendency is to put our best foot forward, to promote ourselves. We always do it. And it's no different when we approach God. We outline the wonderful things that we do, who we are, and say, please find me acceptable.

And even when we do, at times, mention the things we do wrong, we kind of justify it, or minimise it as much as possible. So, I don't evade tax, I just minimise tax.

[10 : 52] I don't lie, it's just the occasional white lie. I don't gossip, I just share prayer points. I don't ridicule people, because I was really only joking. I'm not committing adultery, I'm having a midlife crisis.

I don't steal stamps from work, I was just borrowing the stamps from work. And so, in the end of it, it's not that bad in the end.

But God knows the heart. And this is what the Pharisee prays in verse 11, God, I thank you, that I'm not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like that tax collector over there, God.

I fast twice a week, and give a tenth of all that I get. Now, it's so easy to send this guy up, and I think it's the reason why Jesus actually does set him up like this, because we are to send him up.

He basically says, hey God, I'm just ever so terribly marvelous. Ever so terribly marvelous.

[11 : 58] And do you know what I think is the despicable thing about it? He spiritualizes it so well. He spiritualizes his self-righteousness.

God, I thank you. I thank you that you've made a difference in my life. I thank you that I'm not like other people. I thank you that you've changed me. I thank you, God.

He at least recognized that it's God who's done it in him, but it's self-righteous at the core. And then he goes on and explains how he's different from other people.

He says, I fast twice a week. That is, he goes without food twice a week. General Jewish practice by first century was that they did it once or twice a year, and occasionally they felt like it.

This guy does it twice a week. And not just that, he gives a tenth of all that he gets. I mean, this guy is tithing his tomato plant, and his rosary bush, and everything.

[13 : 03] He's giving a tenth of all that he gets. And what he is saying, in effect, is, God, I'm okay. I'm okay. But the problem is, his evaluation of himself is based on the wrong standard.

He looks around him, and says, I'm glad I'm not like those other scum. And God, you've made the difference in me. I know a guy who is serving two consecutive life sentences in Long Bay Jail for a murder of a mother and a baby.

And he was in, at one stage, in the same wing of Long Bay Jail as a bunch of guys known as the Milpera bikie massacre guys, the criminals who were charged with murder for that.

They gunned down a seven-year-old girl and others. They got this guy that I know, these bikie guys, got this guy that I know, beat him up, poured boiling water all over him.

Why? Because he murdered a baby. Even in Long Bay Jail, and even being in Long Bay Jail for the murdering of a seven-year-old girl, you can still find people who are worse than you.

[14 : 20] You can still find people. You can still look down the line and say, yeah, I might be a murderer, but not as bad as that murderer. Even when you are daily, and for the rest of your life surrounded by the consequences of your sin, you can still self-righteously justify a higher position than someone else.

People who should be able to know better in one sense. And so it's a very significant warning for us because we hide it so well. The tax collector is a total contrast to the Pharisee, beats himself on his chest, and he says, God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Who does he compare himself with? Well, in the text, he doesn't really compare himself with anyone, as far as we can tell. A better reading of his statement is this, God, have mercy on me, the sinner.

He's not trying to find comfort in the fact that he's part of a large group of people, all in the same boat. You know, we're all sinners. We all fall short of the glory of God. Yeah, sure, I make my

mistakes.

I fall short. You know, I'm no different than anyone else. I am human after all. He doesn't care about that. He says, God, I am the sinner.

[15:55] I'm the model sinner. I'm the essential sinner. He doesn't compare himself with other people. This guy knows he's not okay with God, and he cries out in despair.

And Jesus says that that scumbag goes home justified by God. It's justified, never sinned. He goes home right with God as his friend. The way that we are to approach God is always, God, have mercy on me, the sinner.

The sinner. The fulfillment of religious duties doesn't put us into God's good books. There is no way to be right with the God of this universe than to ask him for mercy.

And so I want to encourage you to do just that, to throw yourself on the mercy of this God and ask him for his forgiveness. Don't expect to get into his good books via the terrorist method and make demands on God.

[17:04] Don't expect to get into God's good books with a resume method and sort of, you know, write out all your good points and say, God, this should be good enough. Certainly a lot better than a lot of other people.

God is not impressed by religious activity. And that should be a warning for us. Let me say it should be a warning for you.

Now forget that. It should be a warning for me. Now let's be realistic here. I'm the most religious person here, I'd imagine. I suspect so. I mean, I've got a reverend in front of my name.

I've got some theological degrees and some other stuff behind my name. I've been at church three times today. Anyone here beat that? I live at church for goodness sake.

I work at church. I'm full-time in ministry. I travel and I speak in different parts of the country.

[18:07] I train leaders. I run youth ministry events. I've even got a special dress that I can wear at 8.30 when I do church to make me even look more religious. Are you impressed by that?

You wouldn't be if you saw me at 8.30. The fact is you shouldn't be. Because God isn't impressed by it. He's not impressed by it.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you impress God by what you do. It doesn't matter whether it's regular attendance at church, you're giving lots of money, praying on your knees or standing in your closet.

It doesn't matter what it is. It doesn't matter what it is. None of those things contribute anything to you being right with God.

God isn't impressed. In fact, I'd go as far as saying that God hates people putting their confidence in their religious activity.

[19:07] Anyone who says that there is some kind of religious activity that you must do in order to be friends with God is wrong.

Wrong. It's what you call heresy. And the best test case for it is perhaps the first believer.

The first person to go to heaven straight after Jesus. You know, the dude is on the cross beside Jesus. And he's stuck up there on the cross beside Jesus.

And he turns to Jesus and says, Remember me when you come into your kingdom. You see, it's a statement of faith. It's a statement of trust. He recognizes the bloke who's been crucified beside him is no ordinary person.

This guy's a king. And in his death, which is about to happen very soon, he's going to enter his kingdom. This is a kingdom which goes beyond this world.

[20:11] And so what did Jesus say to him as he made his statement of faith and trust in Jesus? Did Jesus say, Yeah, mate, not a problem.

Get yourself down off the cross and get off the church with you. And then you can come into my kingdom. No, that wasn't it. Did he say, Okay, disciple guys, bring up the buckets.

We're going to baptize this dude here. And then he can be in my kingdom. Or, hey, mate, have a crack at speaking in some other weird languages.

And then you can be in my kingdom. No. Today, you will be with me in paradise. Today, you will be with me in paradise.

Because this man had placed his faith in Jesus Christ. Christianity is not about self-righteousness. It is about God given righteousness.

[21 : 13] But this is not just a message for those who need to come to Jesus. It's a message for those who already follow Jesus.

Who have already put their trust in Jesus. Because we could stop here right now and we could pray and say, Father, thank you that I'm not like the Pharisee. But that would be wrong.

Because we are. We'd miss the whole point. You see, it's so easy to start with faith in Jesus. We look at where we're at.

We look at what God has done for us in Jesus. It makes an easy kind of choice. We follow Jesus. We trust in him. But then from that point on, we can start to slide back into religion. It's often a subtle shift, but it's so easy to do.

It's easy because the longer you've been a Christian, the more you hang around with Christian people, the more you're involved in church and youth group and Bible studies and Christian activities and stuff like that, the more time God has had to work on you and shape you and mould you and change you.

[22 : 19] And after a while, you can start to think, Hey God, I'm not too bad. You really have done a marvellous thing in me, God. Of course, I've been working with you on that, but you've done a marvellous thing in me, God.

And you can start to look down your nose at others. It is such a danger. It's such an easy thing to do.

And let me tell you that the more religious activity you do, the easier it is to do. I find it an enormous temptation to be the Pharisee, to look down my nose at other people who don't come up to scratch and wonder why they don't come up to scratch.

That's just in the Gist Church. Forget about anyone else. As if somehow I have mustered up a righteousness all on my own.

It's so easy to shift from faith in Jesus back into what I do. And you start to think, I'm not too bad. In fact, Jesus really knew what he was doing when he invited me to be part of his kingdom.

[23 : 33] And you start to trust in your religion. I got a shocking but marvellous email this week from someone that I know and who's fairly dear to me.

This is a person who grew up in a church, went to church all of his life. He's always gone to church. Went through Sunday school, youth group, became a youth leader. He ended up as a warden in his church.

I've been involved in this person with a number of events, a youth ministry kind of events. He has worked for an Anglican organisation in a high profile position for a number of years.

He then left that and went off to study in Bible College full time and has been going really well at Bible College. Two days ago, I got an email from him and said, Steve, I became a Christian.

Two days ago, I became a Christian. And I'm like, what? I was going to give you a job.

[24 : 36] You had me fooled. You had me fooled. All the time I've known him. Could talk the talk, walk the walk. But he trusted in his own righteousness.

Got to a point where he realised that the sin that was there, he couldn't hold it back any longer and he needed to repent. He needed to confess that it's all been a facade.

He needed to... And God did an amazing work in his life. He has been blown away by Jesus. He reads the Bible now and he just weeps.

He used to put up with the singing at church. Now he enjoys the singing at church. He could never stand singing at church.

For some reason, it was a problem for him and now he just loves it. Yeah, same stupid old hymns and he still... And now he loves them. Blown away by Jesus. The other amazing thing is he sits his end of year exams at Bible College and having just gone to his vice principal and soon his principal and repented of the last 12 months and sending emails to all these Christian people he knows and repenting of deceiving them and exposing his sin to them and what he's held close in his heart.

[26 : 00] And I'm just broken for this guy. I mean, it's just... But awesome stuff as he sits his final exams in the middle of Stuvak right now for the first time in his life he has no fear.

He has no anxiety. But he could have been like this Pharisee and walked away.

Walked out of the temple and not been justified. And I would have got to heaven and I would have been surprised. The question for us is are we totally looking away from ourselves?

When you see yourself standing before King Jesus, the Holy Judge, what are you going to look to? What are you going to trust in in that moment?

Friends, it would be shocking for us not to be terrified by those four words in the middle of verse 14. terrified by them rather than the other.

[27 : 17] I tell you, this man, the tax collector, he went down to his house justified before God rather than the other.

the Pharisee, the righteous one, the one thanking God for his righteousness was not justified, he was condemned.

People who trust in the righteousness that God has worked in them for the basis of their acceptance, their acquittal, their justification before God do not go down to their house justified.

People who really believe that the righteousness that God helps them do in this life is a sufficient basis for their justification before God, Jesus says will not be justified.

justified. So Paul's friends, this is very serious stuff because Jesus is eyeballing people like you and me when he says these words.

[28 : 29] We are not justified by the righteousness that Christ works in us but by the righteousness that Christ is for us.

And so I plead with you today on behalf of Jesus that for your justification you do not look to or trust in what God has worked out in your life.

Instead look to and trust in Christ alone and all that God is for you in him. So hear the words of Jesus again.

Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

This is what we're going to do. We're going to bow our heads and I want each one of you to pour over those words. To think to search to pray am I the Pharisee or am I the tax collector?

[29 : 51] For some of us here we need to make a choice. The choice is we actually do need to put our trust in Jesus and for some of us we need to make a choice. We need to say actually I have been swinging towards my religious activity thinking somehow that helps me to be right with God and I need to come back and look only to Jesus.

Let's take a moment and search our hearts. Gracious God in your mercy we ask that you pour out your spirit upon us now firstly that we might see that we are justified only and ever only by Christ. Father we pray that you would help us to see that clearly for some of us here tonight Lord we need to for the first time come to you and we need to acknowledge that we need you we need to acknowledge that we have failed you that we are like this tax collector and that we are the essential model sinner reveal dig deep Lord as difficult as it is for us to do reveal that darkness that that evil that wickedness that blackness which is in us that filth which offends you may it come out in the open so that you can deal with it so that you can forgive it father for some of us we have known your love for a while but we have slipped from that and that we have moved gradually bit by bit at least being pleased by what you're doing in us in such a way that it gives us confidence self confidence our father bring us back to the cross bring us back to the son bring us back to Jesus may our confidence be him so that we might walk away from this place walk away from here justified and walk into eternity with you justified and we ask it for your sake amen